

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3383

INFO AMEMBASSY SUVA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGA: PINS, PP

SUBJECT: PAPUA NEW GUINEA: COMPROMISE REACHED ON STUDENT
STRIKE

REF: CANBERRA 3515

1. AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT STUDENT STRIKE REPORTED REFTEL WAS CONCLUDED JUNE 11 FOLLOWING FOUR HOUR LONG MEETING BETWEEN CHIEF MINISTER SOMARE AND STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES FROM BOTH PORT MORESBY AND LAE. COMPROMISE REACHED ON STUDENTS' FORTNIGHTLY STIPEND WAS FOR STUDENTS TO ACCEPT INCREASE OF \$3 OR TOTAL OF \$8 EACH TWO WEEKS ON CONDITION THAT GOVERNMENT LOOKED INTO STUDENT COSTS AND MADE REPORT ON THIS SUBJECT IN JULY. OTHER MAJOR STUDENT DEMANDS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THESE DEMANDS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

(A) THAT PROPOSED MINISTERIAL RETREAT OUTSIDE PORT MORESBY BE SOLD. -- GOVERNMENT RESPONDED IT WOULD BE HAPPY TO SELL THE RETREAT RECENTLY PURCHASED FOR \$11,000 IF IT COULD DO SO AT A PROFIT AND SALE COULD BE MADE TO A PAPUA NEW GUINEAN.

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KB) RENEGOTIATION OF BOUGAINVILLE COPPER AGREEMENT TO

EFFECT A RISE IN PNG GOVERNMENT'S EQUITY FROM 20 TO 60 PERCENT. -- GOVERNMENT REPLIED IT WAS BEGINNING NEGOTIATIONS WITH BOUGAINVILLE COPPER WITH RESPECT TO AMENDING THIS AGREEMENT ON JUNE 12. NEWSPAPERS REPORT FIRST SESSION OF THIS MEETING HAS NOW TAKEN PLACE ALTHOUGH DISCUSSIONS ARE BEING HELD IN PRIVATE.

(C) THAT PNG MINISTERS BE DISCOURAGED FROM TAKING LONG TRIPS OVERSEAS AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE. -- CHIEF MINISTER SOMARE STATED THAT ALL TRIPS BY GOVERNMENT REPS WERE BEING CAREFULLY VETTED BY AN INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE BEFORE SUCH TRAVEL OVERSEAS WAS APPROVED.

2. COMMENT: CLIPPING RELATING TO OTHER STUDENT DEMANDS BEING TRANSMITTED VIA POUCH. AS PREDICTED REFTEL, GOVERNMENT HAS REACHED ACCOMMODATION WITH STUDENTS WITHOUT AT THE SAME TIME ABDICATING ANY OF ITS RIGHTS. BOTH SOMARE AND EDUCATION MINISTER TAUREKA HAD AT FIRST TAKEN A STRONG ATTITUDE TOWARD THE STUDENTS THREATENING THEM WITH WITHDRAWAL OF THEIR ALL-IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT IF THE STRIKE CONTINUED. AFTER SEVERAL NOISY DEMONSTRATIONS, SOMARE AGREED TO MEET WITH STUDENTS AND SUCCESSFULLY REACHED COMPROMISES NOTED ABOVE. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDENT STRIKE WAS THAT IT WAS FIRST TIME IN 26 MONTHS OF PNG COALITION GOVERNMENT THAT STUDENTS HAVE OPENLY AND IN CONCERT CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT. SOMARE'S HIGH PERSONAL REPUTATION AMONG STUDENTS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN RESTORED BY HIS PERSONAL INTERVENTION AND WILLINGNESS TO SIT DOWN WITH STUDENT LEADERS.
GREEN

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